Internet Apologetics Part 1(of 2)

August 18, 2009 By Kenneth R. Samples <http://www.reasons.org/articles/internet-apologetics-part-1-of-2>

The growth of the Internet has allowed people from all around the globe to converse with one another quickly and conveniently. My children have grown up in an online world. They don't have any of the technology anxieties that my wife and I experience as late baby boomers. I'm afraid that pushing the wrong button might cause Western civilization to disappear.

Religion in general, Christianity in particular, is a hot topic on the Web. Opportunities to engage in dialogues and group chats about the truth of historic Christianity abound. But does cyberspace come with helpful guidelines (in terms of apologetics interaction) to follow? Based on my own online interactions, I've put together a few suggestions that I hope will be useful to you in *your* online discussions.

**Rules of Internet Apologetics Engagement**

1. Resist Internet Anonymity

Obviously there are times when a person may not want to give their real name while on the Web. Some people should never give out such information. This is especially true for young people whose activity on the Internet needs to be carefully supervised by their parents. Safety is always job one because we live in a world occupied by evil people.

Nevertheless, there are potential drawbacks to not revealing your name or identity when in discussion mode, especially about issues of spiritual truth. Anonymous people have a tendency to act in less responsible ways and to say things they would never say if their identity were known. When someone can't be held personally accountable, there is a strong propensity to dodge the truth and resort to game playing and name-calling.

By being candid about *your* identity you are encouraging others who are less forthright to engage in an open and honest discussion about matters of truth. Personally, I will not participate in an online discussion without giving my real name. The problem with cyberspace is that it places potential obstacles in the way of candor, transparency, and accountability. And these are important virtues to exhibit when it comes to sharing and defending the Gospel of Christ.

2. Take Them One at a Time

Chat rooms on the Web make it possible to interact with multiple people on a given subject virtually at the same time. However, group discussions often become scattered. It is difficult to make substantive progress on an issue when the topic bounces back and forth like a ping-pong ball.

I recommend, when at all possible, limiting a serious discussion t**o a one-on-one dialogue.** People often act differently when they're part of a group; usually they are more carefree and even cavalier. But a more private conversation even on the Internet allows for a greater opportunity for a meaningful exchange. The power of the gospel is often most evident when it is communicated from one person directly to another.

In the next installment I will discuss a couple more suggestions concerning Internet apologetics.

For more about answering tough apologetics questions, see [*Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith Questions*](http://www.reasons.org/catalog/without-doubt). For more about the robust Christian worldview, see [*A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test*](http://www.reasons.org/catalog/world-difference).

Internet Apologetics, Part 2 (of 2)

August 25, 2009

By Kenneth R. Samples

What would you say to someone about Christianity if all you could say were limited to just about 100 words? In a case like that I would likely choose to communicate the 114 words known as the [Apostles' Creed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostles'_Creed). In an apologetics context people often need a clear description of what Christianity is all about. The Apostles' Creed provides an excellent and well-respected summary of the faith.

In [part one](http://www.reasons.org/articles/internet-apologetics-part-1-of-2) of this series I offered two suggestions for people who engage in apologetics discussions on the Internet. Such online conversations could be greatly enhanced if all parties—with Christians leading the way—exercised greater personal candor, transparency, and accountability in one-on-one discussions.

**Rules of Internet Apologetics Engagement**

**3. Teach Them How to Fish**

A Christian can never answer all the questions and challenges seekers or skeptics present via an Internet exchange, even if that interaction is lengthy or ongoing. Providing exhaustive answers to apologetic questions just isn't possible. Yet some approach online apologetics thinking that way. A better and more realistic goal is to provide clear, concise, cogent, and compelling answers. I call that the "four C's" of apologetics discourse.

Along with answering the typical questions that nonbelievers ask, apologists on the Web should make it their goal to provide people with reliable sources where individuals can seek further answers. This could take the form of recommending solid apologetics websites, articles, or books. Such recommendations make it easier for a person to take the next step if they so desire.

**4. Pay Attention to Attitude and Demeanor**

Email and Internet exchanges can come across as rather cold and impersonal. Since you can't see the person's face or hear the inflection in their voice you have very few clues for interpreting the context of their words. Christians need to take extra steps in communicating a respectful attitude and a gracious demeanor. This means **staying clear of inappropriate sarcasm** **and ridicule**. It also means communicating understanding, empathy, and good humor.

Attitude and demeanor are often as important—when it comes to personal persuasion—as one's arguments. People tend to believe ideas communicated by people they respect and trust. Since online discussions are distant in more than one way, believers should give thoughtful consideration to how they present the claims of Christ.

May the Holy Spirit guide you in your apologetics adventures down the information superhighway.

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